

# When the Sun Sets on Good Judgment

A Sailor and his buddy start an all-night party with 18 holes of golf and a 12-pack on an Alaskan course similar to this one. The party ends the next morning with the buddy in a hospital.

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One nice summer day in Fairbanks, Alaska, my buddy, John, and I decided to go golfing when maintenance had secured for liberty. It was about 1700, but time wasn't a problem because the sun never really sets in Fairbanks this time of year.

By the time we had picked up drinks, munchies and other essentials, it was about 1730. Another half-hour passed while we finished our errands and practiced on the driving range. Finally, we teed up and popped our first drink. Eighteen holes and a 12-pack later, we decided to get something to eat. It was 2230 when we headed to a popular restaurant.

Both John and I felt like we could take on the world by this time, so, after we had eaten, we stayed out to party while a designated driver took some friends back to the base. At midnight, with the sun still shining brightly, we ran into some people who were going jet skiing. They asked us to join them.

About 0500 in the morning (Saturday), we arrived at a huge pond that looked great for skiing. John and I donned some shorts and jumped in. The sun had warmed the first four feet or so of the water, but everything below that level was much colder.

Perhaps you're beginning to wonder when John and I planned to go to bed. To tell you the truth, the idea hadn't yet crossed our minds. We felt we could party as long as the sun was shining—a big mistake.

The owners of the jet skis lived on the other side of the pond, so we decided to swim the 200 to 300 yards to get there. John took off like a shot; I, on the other hand, took it easy. I knew I wasn't in the best shape, and I didn't need to race him. Besides that, I wanted to keep an eye on everyone in the water. The first hundred yards found me getting tired, but I felt sure I could make it. My buddy, however, was having second thoughts.

Thirty yards from shore, John yelled my name and asked for help. It wasn't his normal tone, so I quickly caught up to him. When I came alongside, he looked right at me, but I knew he didn't see me. He was in a state of panic. After asking for help one more time, he disappeared below the surface of the murky water.

I dove down, found his wrist, and pulled him back to the surface. He spit up some water and started gasping for air. I then rolled him on his back and pulled him to shore. John was underwater only a few seconds, so I didn't think anything was wrong. I figured all he needed was a few minutes to catch his breath, and he would be fine.

After learning the jet-ski owners weren't home, we returned to the van we had come in and headed back. John seemed to be doing fine, but I felt something wasn't right. After a few miles of bumpy roads, he started complaining of chest pains, so I decided to take him to a hospital.

Doctors admitted him as a near-drowning victim. During his overnight stay, they discovered his kidneys were failing, and he had an irregular heartbeat. If I had waited much longer to get my buddy to the hospital, he might not be alive today.

When I returned home from the hospital, I passed out from exhaustion, even though I still hadn't felt tired. I didn't realize the effect 24 hours of sunlight could have on a person. That phenomenon, combined with our impaired judgment from the alcohol we had consumed, nearly killed my buddy.

The sun still stays up all day in Fairbanks, but I give my body the rest it needs. When I go out partying, I know my limitations, and I stay within them. Life is too precious just to throw it away in a few moments of carelessness. ■

*The author was assigned to VAW-117 when he wrote this article.*